United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/108

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 November 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third session
11–22 March 2019
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-20295 (E) 071218

Please recycle

Statement

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd welcomes the opportunity to make a written statement on the priority theme of the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, reviewing significant policy areas — the provision of social protection, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure — and how these can contribute to the empowerment of girls and women. The theme appears to neglect the globalized reality within which marginalized and discriminated girls and women live, which contributes significantly to keeping in place the systems and structures of gender inequality.

The current global economic system appears to prioritize profit over people's lives and the environment. Patriarchy, racism, and capitalism work together in oppressing and disempowering girls and women. Tax injustice, the privatization of public services and implementation of austerity measures, which negatively impact or remove social protection systems, are counter forces that need to be addressed according to the principles of gender justice, economic justice, and environmental justice. The effects of the exploitative nature of gender inequality, economic and environmental injustice on girls, women, and children are stark. Women and girls are disempowered through the perpetuation of patriarchal power dynamics. These abuses, seen particularly in prostitution, the trafficking of girls, women and children for sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, an ever-growing informal economy, and unpaid care work, all serve to reinforce structures of gender inequality and injustice. Until there is a paradigm shift away from these exploitative systems and structures, it will not be possible to usher in a more equitable, human rights-informed global order based on the principles of solidarity, compassion, and concern.

Social protection systems encompass multiple terms including 'social protection', 'social security', 'social protection floors', 'social insurance' and more recently, 'universal social protection'. The international community has long recognized the obligation of States to provide social protection in order to ensure that everyone has their basic needs met and is able to realise all other human rights. Social security was first recognised as a human right 70 years ago in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In 1952, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 102 on Social Security (Minimum Standards) elaborated basic social security principles and established worldwide-agreed minimum standards for nine branches of social security: medical care, sickness benefit, unemployment benefit, old-age benefit, employment injury benefit, family benefit, maternity benefit, invalidity benefit, and survivors' benefit.

Since then, the right to social security has been enshrined in numerous international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 26) recognising 'for every child the right to benefit from social security, including insurance.' The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women explicitly recognises the equal rights of women to social security 'particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave' (Article 11(1)(e)). More recently, ILO put forward Recommendation 202 on National Floors of Social Protection, which are included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically in Sustainable Development Goals 1.3, 3.8, 5.4, 8.5 and 10.4. Full implementation of ILO Recommendation 202, composed of four basic asks: healthcare for all, income for children (including nutrition, education and services), income security for those of working age who cannot work, and income for elderly persons, would go a long way towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The World Social Protection Report, "Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 2017–19", indicates that only 45 per cent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social benefit, while the remaining 55 per cent — 4 billion people — are left unprotected. Within this group, girls and women tend to be quantitatively and qualitatively worse off than men, as they are less likely to be covered or are provided with lesser benefits. The lack of social protection coverage leaves women and girls vulnerable to ill-health, poverty, inequality and social exclusion throughout their life cycles. Failure to provide social protection is a significant obstacle to gender equality, and to economic and social development. Implementation of rights-based social protection systems for all requires strong political will, the drafting of policy and the allocation of substantive budget to translate words into action.

It is to a small segment of the 4 billion people worldwide who do not have access to social protection that the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd extends social protection measures. The 2017 annual report of Good Shepherd International Foundation indicates that 176,000 people benefited from a total of USD 4 million dollars in 19 countries, with a specific focus on girls, women, and children. Where state-supported social protection is non-existent, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd prioritizes the empowerment of vulnerable girls and women, who experience multidimensional poverty and the systemic violations of their dignity, to implement projects.

Good Shepherd projects are usually initiated at the local level and scaled up when possible. The 'Mission Development Offices' in Asia Pacific and Latin America offer good practices for regional coordination. The Asia Pacific team has worked to implement strategic plans and monitor grants that allow for local Good Shepherd programs to continue implementing social protection services and empowerment programmes, towards community building and social inclusion. The Latin American team has invested greatly in microfinance programs, giving girls and women access to economic security and basic human rights. Working with migrant women near the border of Chile and Bolivia, Good Shepherd Services has offered skills training in craft and food production, business management and entrepreneurship development. The combination of skills training and microfinance loans empowers these women economically to create their own businesses and work towards sustainable incomes.

Two documentary projects — "Maisha", based on the projects in Kolwezi in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and "Mahila: A Women's Movement Rising" which shares stories of empowerment in a rural Dalit community in India — provide models of development that could be replicated by governments and civil society. The project in olwezi has created a model to eradicate child labour in mines, rescuing more than 1600 children. Further, the project has built secure communities, empowered women, increased farming and income generation, improved local structures and created safe space for girls, women, and children in a situation where access to public services and infrastructure are very limited or non- existent. Government provision of such services would significantly contribute to the further empowerment of women, girls and the whole community.

The economic justice project in India, begun in 2014, addresses the triple oppression due to gender, caste, and impoverished economic status of the most marginalized women from Dalit and tribal communities living in five rural villages in India. The project helps women achieve economic, social and political empowerment through income generating programs, skills-training and basic human rights education. Becoming empowered to economically sustain themselves and their families through business activities and through social inclusion is indeed a form of social security upholding the right to engage in work with dignity. Public services and

infrastructure to enhance well-being and promote empowerment are necessary for the flourishing of gender justice.

Recommendations:

Enact a just, integrated and sustainable model of development, inclusive of gender, environmental, and economic justice, that puts the interests of disempowered, marginalized and impoverished girls, women and their communities at the centre of policy concerns, ahead of the corporate agenda, and upholds the protection of their human rights.

Establish human rights-based, gender-sensitive Social Protection Floors at the national level as a first step in the creation of Universal Social Protection, in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda, and 'to reach those furthest behind first.'

Express strong political will to reject austerity measures in favour of the implementation of social protection systems financed through progressive taxation, addressing Illicit flows, and the reallocation of military expenditures.

Ensure better access to health care, quality education, skills training, and public services for girls and women.

Enable inclusive, non-tokenistic participation for girls and women at all levels of decision-making including policy design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.